



MCDHH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FIRST LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

It is my privilege to greet the esteemed citizens of Missouri and especially those in the Deaf, Deaf-blind, Hard of Hearing community, and the many hearing people with a vested interest in issues related to hearing loss. Missourians have “shown me” a truly heart-warming and enthusiastic welcome. Thank you. A year ago, I brought my family to Saint Louis to cheer for our favorite European soccer team; little did I know I would call Missouri my home a year later. Accordingly, I have adopted Sporting Kansas City as my favorite soccer team in America and will be rooting for KC going forward.

I am delighted to have had the honor of succeeding Mr. Ernest Garrett, who is a true trailblazer, a meticulous leader and administrator of unparalleled finesse. He officially received me on my first day in office and took the time to introduce me to some of the key people in government. By the grace of that singular act, I have been able to forge relationships that are proving to be essential for the programs of MCDHH.

For fear that my memory will falter and I will forget the names of some of the many, many, friendly and distinguished people I’ve met I will not call names, but I do want to share with you my meetings with four groups that might be of interest to you.

My meetings with Dr. Stephen Barr, Assistant Commissioner at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Ms. Shari LePage, DESE Chief Budget Officer, and Ms. Andrea Beck, DESE Chief Finance Officer, were very encouraging. I am confident that we are on course to finalize the overhauling of the Missouri Interpreter Certification System. My predecessor had already laid a solid foundation for its revitalization because Missouri is known as the premiere state to pass a law requiring that sign language interpreters be Certified and Licensed. With the support of DESE, I am looking forward to completing the first phase of the system. I am happy that I will also be working with well-grounded staff members who are not only competent, but also equally inspired and committed to making a difference in the lives of Missourians with hearing loss.

At the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Conference I participated in biennial meetings of the National Association of State Agencies for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASDHH), alongside my predecessor. During the meeting, it was resolved that the biennial meeting should henceforth be held annually and move in between both NAD conferences and the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) conferences. By default, the 2015 HLAA Conference will be held in Saint Louis. I am excited about the prospect of joining forces to make this a successful conference.

At the NAD Conference, I met several illustrious Missourians along with Elena Mayer who won the inaugural Youth Ambassador Program (YAP) and thus forever etched Missouri in the sands of history. It was a proud moment for me because I was one of the judges for the YAP contest. Fortuitously, while at NAD, I also met with the President and Secretary of the Missouri Association of the Deaf, Mr. William Walker and Ms. Karen Lister and we agreed on the need to work collaboratively.

From my first day in the office, I have been in contact with the MCDHH Commissioners. I must acknowledge that their responses have been overwhelmingly positive. I have no doubt that their dedication and commitments to the goal of the Commission will come to fruition as we work together and seek better ways to improve our services to the constituency.

Please bear with me as I review the current programs of the Commission with the view that the focus should be to make it constituency-centered. I intend to strengthen MCDHH relationships with organized groups all over Missouri. I will make every effort to be at the forefront of advocating constituency needs in accordance with the mandates of MCDHH. You can call my office at any time and be assured that your concerns will be addressed in a timely fashion and with the best practices expected from a public agency. I maintain an open door policy and welcome your input. I am aware of the numerous challenges facing us, including budget cuts, but I will work meticulously and judiciously to utilize the resources at my disposal for programs that will add value to our community. I hope to meet each and every one of you to learn of your issues and concerns. It is my fervent wish that all constituencies would join hands with me so we can work together to make Missouri a better place for everyone regardless of identity and communication mode.

“We are mighty when we speak with one accord; we are stronger when we walk in unity!!!”

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